NARROW ESCAPE

In Pskov, the barracks were in turmoil. My office was in the midst of a hornets' nest. I was not sure whether the members of my staff approved of my activity, which was very different from the normal work in the office of a commissar of the front. I had neither the time nor the desire to argue with them and continued to carry the whole work load and responsibility, with Emma to help me with direct wires and the telephone.

In the evening the Military Revolutionary Committee called a joint meeting of the local Soviet and representatives of the troops stationed in and around Pskov. The meeting, held in the city theater, opened with reports on the storming of the Winter Palace by the people. Next came the announcement that the new government, the Council of the People's Commissars, had offered a truce to Germany and had given land to the peasants. There remained only one obstacle to peace, freedom, and socialism: the counterrevolutionary forces of General Krasnov moving against the capital.

Soldiers were sent to my office to take me to the meeting to be questioned about my role in the expedition. When the men arrived, Emma was with me in the telegraph room helping me in reading, sorting, and answering the telegrams. She had no illusions about the seriousness of the situation, but believed that we were right in trying to resist the Communist assault. Before leaving I told her I was going to the theater. She remained at the direct wire with our telegraph operator.

The theater was packed, and armed soldiers were milling around it. The front rows in the hall were occupied by the members of the local Soviet—the S-R and Mensheviks on the right, the Bolsheviks on the left. Representatives of the troops occupied all the other seats in the orchestra. The aisles, galleries, and the space behind the seats were jammed with armed men. I took a seat on the stage, at the chairman's table, and asked him what information the meeting wished from me.

A local Bolshevik, a civil engineer, jumped to the front of the stage, screaming that I was one of the warmongers who had dragged Russia into the imperialistic war and was growing fat and rich on the sweat and blood of the simple people. If it had not been for me, the war would have ended long since! After this introduction, he took up my role in calling on the troops against revolutionary Petrograd and read a transcript of my telephone calls and telegrams—my office wires had been tapped. The crowd responded with shouts of rage. Only the men in the front sat silent.

When I got up to reply, I was greeted with a furor of curses and